

is in America's power to unilaterally resolve conflicts by simply walking away from them.

Of course all wars must end. The question is now how they end and whether the terms on which they end are favorable or unfavorable to the security and interests of the United States.

And nothing about the circumstances we face today suggests that if we lose resolve, the terrorists will simply leave us alone.

Over the last 4 years, the Trump administration has made tremendous headway in creating the conditions that will secure the enduring defeat of the terrorists. This President and his policies have strengthened America's hand in multiple Middle East conflicts while reducing the risks and costs to our country. The ISIS caliphate has been shattered, and millions have been liberated from their brutal rule. We have removed master terrorists like al-Baghdadi, Soleimani, and senior al-Qaida and ISIS leaders from the battlefield.

The Trump administration has brokered diplomatic successes that should help bring long-term stability and more economic opportunity to a troubled region. The Abraham Accords are a geostrategic game changer.

The last 4 years have also brought increased skin in the game from our allies and our partners. Our friends in Europe and elsewhere have a shared interest in stopping safe havens for terror. Today, in Africa, our limited American presence supports a multinational initiative led by France to combat radical Islamic terrorists.

Likewise, in places where American forces continue to play roles in ongoing conflicts across the broader Middle East, Secretaries Mattis and Esper worked hard and successfully to secure renewed contributions from European partners and to transition our posture more and more toward a supporting role.

Our local partners are demonstrably shouldering the lion's share of the burden in the fight. In neither Afghanistan nor Iraq nor Syria are American combat forces playing a primary role.

We have scored major battlefield successes by supporting and working with and through local partners, such as the Afghan National Security Forces, the elite Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service, and the local Kurdish and Arab fighters of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

So the situation we face today is totally different than what we faced 10 years ago. We do not have hundreds of thousands of soldiers engaged in combat abroad.

We do not have hundreds of thousands of soldiers engaged in combat abroad. We are not an occupying force.

Today, our limited American military presence in the Middle East is supporting local forces and enabling multinational efforts.

We are playing a limited—limited but important role in defending Amer-

ican national security and American interests against terrorists who would like nothing more than for the most powerful force for good in the world to simply pick up our ball and go home.

They would love that. That is why, last year, 70 Senators—a bipartisan supermajority—voted for an amendment I authored that acknowledged the progress made in Syria and Afghanistan, identified the risks that remain, and cautioned that precipitous withdrawal would create vacuums that Iran, Russia, and the terrorists would be delighted—delighted—to fill.

There is no American who does not wish the war in Afghanistan against terrorists and their enablers had already been conclusively won. But that does not change the actual choice before us now.

A rapid withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan now would hurt our allies and delight—delight—the people who wish us harm. Violence affecting Afghans is still rampant. The Taliban is not abiding by the conditions of the so-called peace deal.

The consequences of a premature American exit would likely be even worse than President Obama's withdrawal from Iraq back in 2011, which fueled—fueled—the rise of ISIS and a new round of global terrorism. It would be reminiscent of the humiliating American departure from Saigon in 1975.

We would be abandoning our partners in Afghanistan, the brave Afghans who are fighting the terrorists and destroying the government's leverage in their talks with the Taliban that are designed to end the fighting.

Our retreat would embolden the Taliban, especially the deadly Haqqani wing, and risk plunging Afghan women and girls back into what they experienced back in the 1990s. It would hand a weakened and scattered al-Qaida a big, big propaganda victory and a renewed safe haven for plotting attacks against America. And it would be welcome news to Iran, which has long provided arms and support to the Taliban and explicitly seeks our retreat from the Middle East.

A disorganized retreat would jeopardize the track record of major successes this administration has worked hard to compile. A number of former officials and Ambassadors recently stated: "The spectacle of U.S. troops abandoning facilities and equipment, leaving the field in Afghanistan to the Taliban and ISIS, would be broadcast around the world as a symbol of U.S. defeat and humiliation, and a victory for Islamist extremism."

President Trump deserves major credit—major credit—for reducing U.S. forces in Afghanistan to a sustainable level, scoring major victories against terrorists across the region, and ensuring the Afghans themselves are at the front of the fight.

That same successful approach should continue until the conditions for the long-term defeat of ISIS and al-Qaida have been achieved.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 505, H.R. 6395.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 6395) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2021 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the Inhofe substitute amendment at the desk be considered and agreed to and that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment (No. 2682), in the nature of a substitute, was agreed to as follows:

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

Mr. McCONNELL. I know of no further debate on the bill, as amended.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate, the bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

The bill (H.R. 6395), as amended, was passed.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. McCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF JUDY SHELTON

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, tomorrow, the Senate will vote on the nomination of Judy Shelton to serve on the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve. Judy Shelton's views are breathtakingly extreme and retrograde. She actually seems to prefer the economic policies that foregrounded

the Great Depression. She has openly advocated a return to the gold standard. She has long questioned the need for Federal deposit insurance, and, in March 2009, in the midst of our last economic crisis, she questioned: Why do we need a central bank?

Imagine someone like Ms. Shelton, with her retrograde views, sitting on the Federal Reserve during a time of economic crisis? Imagine someone like that making decisions about monetary policy back in April, when our economy was in free fall? We should not confirm to the Federal Reserve someone who would likely stymie efforts to dig ourselves out of this economic crisis.

I urge every one of my colleagues, Democratic and Republican, to reject this terrible, terrible nomination.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, COVID-19, as we know, unfortunately, has upended nearly every aspect of American life for the better part of a year. But as impatient as we all are for our lives to return to normal, the harsh truth of the matter is that the coming months may be, by far, the worst of the pandemic.

Cases have skyrocketed to well over 150,000 Americans per day. We are now recording more than 1 million new COVID cases a week. Hospital ICUs and morgues in many parts of the country are approaching or even beyond capacity.

Americans must brace themselves for a long winter. We cannot tire of the simple precautions that limit the spread of the disease and save lives. Wear a mask, social distance, avoid large indoor gatherings, and stay vigilant. We must all continue to do our part to prevent this next surge from overwhelming our health systems and endangering our fellow citizens. Congress, as well, should be doing all that is necessary to support those efforts and prevent the worst from happening.

Too many Americans have lost healthcare coverage as a result of losing their jobs this year. Medicaid has seen a huge increase in new enrollees and needs resources. As unemployment remains in the tens of millions, extending unemployment insurance is paramount, and many more things besides.

Speaker PELOSI and I have been in regular communication with President-Elect Biden and his transition team. Unlike the current administration, the incoming administration wants to move rapidly to get a handle on the virus and recover our economy. Today, President-Elect Biden urged the Senate to pass the Heroes Act—comprehensive legislation that leaves no one behind. That is just the right approach. Our country deserves a bill that meets the needs of the American people and that meets the needs of the moment.

If Leader MCCONNELL and our Republican colleagues want to sit down and

negotiate a bipartisan solution with a bipartisan process, Democrats are ready and willing and able to do so, but, unfortunately, it has been 2 weeks since Leader MCCONNELL said he was in charge of negotiating the next COVID-19 relief bill, and he still hasn't spoken to Speaker PELOSI or myself.

We have 14 votes on the floor this week on nominations for a lame-duck President, but we have nothing—nothing—pertaining to COVID. There is, however, a bit of good news today. A second U.S. company announced that it has discovered an effective vaccine in phase 3 trials. Early figures suggest it is close to 95 percent effective. As these two vaccines move through the final approval process, we should prepare the country to produce and distribute them to everyone in a comprehensive bill that includes robust vaccine funding.

Finally, there is light at the end of the tunnel, but we are still in that tunnel and may be so for several months. So we must pull together, once again, to do everything in our individual power to turn the tide of the virus.

2020 ELECTIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, instead of working to pull the country back together so we can fight our common enemy, COVID-19, the Republican majority is busy spreading conspiracy theories denying reality and poisoning the well of our democracy.

It seems like Republicans all over Washington are auditioning for "Profiles in Cowardice," nudging each other aside to say who can say the most outlandish thing in support of President Trump's baseless claims of election fraud. Two Members of this Chamber went so far as to accuse their State's election result of not being delivered honestly because President Trump didn't win. They demanded their own Secretary of State, a fellow Republican, resign. The two Senators provided no evidence—not a shred—to support the claim that the election wasn't conducted honestly.

A Republican Governor this weekend supported the idea of States sending alternative slates of electors to the electoral college. He encouraged Republican State legislators and States that voted for Joe Biden to literally ignore the will of the voters to send electors who would vote for Donald Trump.

I understand my Republican colleagues dislike the results of the Presidential election, but this has gone beyond ridiculous. This is reckless. President Trump is working to convince millions of Americans that the election wasn't fair and was stolen without a scrap of evidence. Whatever fears my colleagues might have about President Trump abandoning their party if they don't show sufficient support, that is no excuse for sanctioning his efforts to discredit our democratic elections.

The percentage of Republicans who now believe that the election was not free and fair has doubled to 70 per-

cent—70—in the United States of America. How much longer will Senate Republicans stand by while President Trump shreds Americans' faith in our democracy.

So I have a very simple message for my colleagues. The election is over. President Trump lost. Joe Biden will be the next President of the United States. KAMALA HARRIS will be the next Vice President of the United States. All over the country legal claims by the President are being laughed out of court. Ironically, the President's legal challenges have accomplished one thing: They have revealed just how secure our elections were. As courts from Pennsylvania to Michigan, to Arizona dismiss these claims, they are confirming there is no credible evidence of fraud or irregularities. So far, not one vote has been tossed out. These are facts, and the longer Republicans refuse to acknowledge them, the more damage is done.

In order to keep up this charade, the Trump administration is now actually denying national security briefings to President-Elect Biden. It is actively refusing to coordinate with the incoming administration on the coronavirus. How unimaginably stupid is that? We shouldn't even be discussing for 1 minute whether or not Republicans will accept the democratic results of our Presidential election or whether the next President should receive security briefings. That should be a given. But it appears, sadly, unfortunately, my Republican colleagues will follow President Trump all the way down the rabbit hole to the very bitter end of his very bitter Presidency. And every day that goes by, the more damage is done to our country, to our national security, to our ability to fight COVID, and to America's faith in our democracy.

So I plead with my Republican colleagues: Stop denying reality. Stop recklessly sowing doubt about our democratic process. Stop going down to the lowest common denominator that President Trump seems to live with all the time, and start focusing on COVID. Let's bring this country together and get some things done.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.